



Government of South Australia

Department of Environment,
Water and Natural Resources

6 August 2014

Hon Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
9th Floor, Chesser House
91- 97 Grenfell Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000

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Ack.	
Action Officers	/ LH
Response due	

Witjira National Park
Co-management Board

Railway Station
PO Box 78
Port Augusta SA 5700
Australia
DX51009

Ph: +61 8 8648 5348
Fax: +61 8 8648 5301

www.environment.sa.gov.au

Dear Minister

Re: Reform of South Australian Government Boards and Committees

I refer to the recent letter from the Premier dated 8th July 2014, regarding the reform of South Australian Government Boards and Committees. Thank you for your subsequent letter of 1 August requesting that our Board provides a direct response to you on this matter.

The Witjira National Park Co-management Board considered the correspondence at the most recent meeting held on 4 August 2014. The Board resolved that I write to you expressing concern that our Co-management Board has the potential to be abolished. Both your letter and that of the Premier invited us to demonstrate how our Board aligns with the principles of independence and efficiency. We are confident that this letter details not only the efficiency and independence of our Board, but also the risks associated with abolishing the current arrangement.

Background

The Witjira National Park was dedicated in 1985 and incorporates 768,853 hectares of the internationally significant Dalhousie Mound Springs complex and multiple other landforms indicative of desert regions.

The Park is part of the traditional country of the Lower Southern Arrernte and Wangkangurru (representing Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation) people for whom it is of special cultural significance, containing a wide range of cultural features and evidence of past occupation.

In 2007, the State of South Australia and the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation (IAC) entered into a Co-management Agreement (CMA) and Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA). The Aboriginal Board members are nominated by the community, and as such represent the cultural views and aspirations of the community when making decisions for the management of the park.

Why have our Board?

The Co-management framework provides for use of the park by the Aboriginal people in such a way that their cultural, economic, social and environmental aspirations can be enhanced in a manner consistent with the management objectives of the Park.

Independence

Co-management of the park involves a partnership between the Government of South Australia and traditional owners to share responsibility and decision-making for the strategic management of the Witjira National Park. Since the inception of Co-management, traditional owner people have for the first time, been actively engaged and enjoyed self-determination with the management of this Park.

The Witjira National Park is of great significance to all traditional owners, and the Co-management Board has a long history in engaging with and representing the views and interests of the Aboriginal community, and ensuring the strong cultural and spiritual values of the park are conserved and protected.

Risks & Efficiency

As you are aware, the co-management framework meets a number of the State's Strategic Plan Targets, including:

Aboriginal wellbeing – Target 6

- Reconciliation, Cultural and Traditional Lands
 - Number of National Park Co-management Agreements (indicator 19)
 - Native title claims resolved (indicator 21)
- Governance and Leadership
 - Number of Aboriginal people on government boards and committees (indicator 17)

Aboriginal lands native title - Target 44

- Resolve 80% of native title claims by 2020

Additionally, the productive relationships we have established with DEWNR through the Co-Management Board are built on respect and trust, which have come with the passage of time and the ability to meet 'on country' to debate and make decisions together that affect the management of the park.

Finally, the CMA and ILUA arrangements are integral to the native title rights and the consent determination process and were entered into in good faith with the South Australian Government. The risks associated with repealing the governance arrangements that underpin these agreements are significant. It will result in an erosion of the trust traditional owners put in the Government. It will also likely increase the costs associated with engaging with aboriginal people on park management issues as there will be no "peak body" to manage this interface.

The Co-management Board considers that the alternative engagement options as outlined in the Premier's letter (Your SAY, Government chat service, and citizens juries) would not provide an appropriate mechanism for engaging with the Aboriginal community, many of whom have limited access to technology and live in remote and isolated areas.

I trust you will agree that the Governance arrangements around our Co-Management Board demonstrate a 'best practice' approach to engaging the Aboriginal community in the effective management of the park.

Yours sincerely

Grant Pelton

Grant Pelton
CHAIRPERSON
WITJIRA NATIONAL PARK CO-MANAGEMENT BOARD

cc: Jason Irving, Manager Protected Areas
Stuart Paul, Regional Manager, South Australian Arid Lands
John Schutz, Group Executive Director, Partnerships and Stewardship
Tim Goodes, Group Executive Director, Strategy and Advice
Allan Holmes, Chief Executive

